

How Much Should I Forgive? Mt 18:21-35

- A. *Did you hear the story about the boy who told the barber, "I forgive you" after his mother told him to say something nice to the barber after he received a bad haircut.*
- B. There are so many times we need to say, "I forgive you."
1. We forget to take out the trash & our spouse speaks words that cut us to the core.
 2. Our children are busy raising their families & they don't come by as often as we think they should, and we get hurt.
 3. Someone in the congregation shares something we told them in confidence.
 4. A co-worker knows we are working hard to receive a promotion & knows how desperately we need the money. He doesn't really want the job, but he applies for it just because we do, and he gets it.
 5. We're waiting on a parking place right in front of Wal-Mart, a family has already placed their groceries in the car & are ready to pull out. Someone else sees us waiting & pulls into that spot.
- C. Jesus taught us much about forgiveness.
1. The reason Jesus taught so much about forgiveness is clear--Paul told us that in forgiving others we become "imitators of God" Ephesians 4:32-5:1 32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. 5:1 Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children
 2. Jesus' disciples needed a lesson on forgiveness, and in this text he provides that lesson.

WE GIVE UNLIMITED FORGIVENESS, vv 21-22

- A. Peter comes to Jesus and says, "Lord, how often should I forgive my brothers? Up to seven times?" v 21.
1. Peter is really being generous.
 - a. Rabbinic teaching in that day said that one should forgive his brother three times.
 - b. Peter had doubled that number & added on to it for good measure.
 2. In Scripture, seven stands for completeness. Perhaps Peter saw sevenfold forgiveness as being complete.
- B. Jesus tells Peter, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven," v 22.
1. Jesus shows Peter that there can be no ceiling on our forgiveness--we must always be willing to forgive.
 2. Jesus does not mean that we should just forgive 490 times, but he

- means that we should always be ready & willing to forgive.
- C. We, as God's children, must be known as a people of forgiveness.
 - 1. Mk 11:25 And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."
 - 2. Col 3:15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.
 - D. Did Abraham Lincoln forgive the man who shot him?
 - 1. What about you? Do you forgive everybody?
 - 2. Are you offering unlimited forgiveness?

WE GIVE UNLIMITED FORGIVENESS BECAUSE WE HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN, vv 23-35

- A. A king wanted to settle accounts with his servants, v 23.
 - 1. "Servants" here likely means the king's public ministers who had to do with financial matters--the king had given them authority over some of his finances.
 - 2. From time to time, the king would require these servants to appear before him & give an account of themselves.
 - 3. The king could remove any official with whom he was not pleased. In an absolute monarchy, the king had that power.
- B. The king forgave a great debt of one of his servants, vv 24-27.
 - 1. A servant was brought before the king who owed him 10,000 talents, v 24.
 - a. Ten thousand talents, depending upon fluctuation in the markets, would be between 15 million & one billion in today's currency.
 - b. The point being made is that there is no way that this servant can repay his master what he owes.
 - 2. Since the servant was not able to pay, the king ordered the man, along with his family & all his property, be sold & payment be made, v 25. The Jewish law allowed the selling of debtors into a mild form of domestic slavery (Lev 25:39 "If any of your fellow Israelites become poor and sell themselves to you, do not make them work as slaves).
 - 3. The servant fell before his master & said, "Master, have patience with me, and I will repay you all," v 26.
 - 4. The master was moved with pity & forgave him his debt, v 27.
 - a. This king did not just give him an extension on his loan; he forgave the debt.
 - b. This servant had no more debts--he was under no more financial obligations to the king.
- C. The forgiven servant refused to forgive a fellow servant who owed him, vv 28-30.
 - 1. This servant went out & found him a servant who owed him a

hundred denarii, took him by the throat & said, "Pay me what you owe!" v 28.

- a. A hundred denarii, according to today's markets, would be between fifteen & one hundred dollars; the point is that this servant did not owe anything near what his creditor had owed.
 - b. The other servant took the one by the throat & demanded that payment be made. This servant demanded that payment be made with violence.
2. His fellow servant fell down at his feet & begged him to have mercy saying that he would repay, v 29.
 3. The servant would not hear of it, but he had him thrown into prison until he should pay the debt, v 30.
 - a. This man showed no regard for the servant's family--he was the breadwinner & without him his family may not have had a way to survive.
 - b. This man showed no gratitude for what he had been forgiven--this man had been forgiven a much, much larger debt, but he didn't seem to care.
 - 1) On the one hand, this man's actions seem right--he had every right to expect that he would be paid what he was owed, and he had every right to throw this man in prison.
 - 2) What makes the man's actions so horrible is his mercilessness in the face of the great mercy shown to him.
- D. The king had the one servant sent to the torturers, vv 31-34.
1. When the man's fellow servants saw what had been done, they were grieved & reported his actions to their master, v 31.
 - a. These fellow servants were grieved--they knew what had just taken place was not right.
 - b. They reported his actions to the king--the king became aware of what had taken place.
 2. The king called the servant before him, vv 32-33.
 - a. The king said to his servant, "You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me."
 - 1) The king does not call this servant "wicked" because of his great debt but because he showed no mercy.
 - 2) The king expected this servant to show mercy because he had been forgiven.
 - b. This servant should have shown mercy because he had been forgiven.
 3. The king sent him to the torturers until he could repay everything, v 34.
 - a. In the east, it was common for the rich to hide their wealth & pretend to be poor to escape paying taxes. Hence, those in

- authority would send people to the torturers to get them to betray their wealth.
- b. Notice that this servant was sent to the torturers until he could repay everything--not just for a limited amount of time.
- E. God does the same if we do not forgive our brothers from our hearts, v 35.
1. Jesus makes the application of the parable very plain--just as we have been forgiven, we must forgive.
 2. Jesus is here teaching that God will not forgive us if we refuse to forgive others. Scripture teaches the same thing elsewhere:
 - a. Mt 5:7, Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy
 - b. Mt 6:15, But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.
 - c. James 2:13, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.
 - d. A man once told John Wesley, "I never forgive." Mr. Wesley replied, "Then, sir, I hope that you never sin."
 - e. A lady stated that she would forgive her friend but that she didn't want anything else to do with her...,
 3. We need to remember just how much God has forgiven us.
 - a. God's Son died that we might be saved from hell--if we are in Christ, he has forgiven us of every sin we've committed.
 - b. Since we have been forgiven so much, surely we can forgive the trespasses against us.
 - 1) What God calls upon us to forgive is really minor compared to what God has forgiven.
 - 2) Even when some great sin has been committed against us, God has forgiven more. We caused the death of his innocent, perfect Son, yet God forgave us.
 4. Illustrations:
 - a. Did you hear about the man who gave money for Japanese missions after his son was killed by the Japanese in WWII?
 - b. An African proverb says, "He who forgives ends the quarrel."
 5. We're not claiming that this teaching of Jesus is easy.
 - a. In no way is it easy--it is rather difficult.
 - b. Yet, God has forgiven us, and he has called upon us to forgive. Are you forgiving those around you?

CONCLUSION

- A. We must forgive our fellow man without limit. We must offer unlimited forgiveness because God has forgiven us without limit.
- B. Have you forgiven others? Are there others whom you need to forgive?
- C. Do you need to receive God's forgiveness today?

Abraham Lincoln on Having a Forgiving Spirit.

I just wanted to share the following words, penned by Abraham Lincoln, on the subject of forgiveness...

"I will greet this day with a forgiving spirit. For too long, every ounce of forgiveness I owned was locked away, hidden from view, waiting for me to bestow its precious presence upon some worthy person. Alas, I found most people to be singularly unworthy of my valuable forgiveness, and since they never asked for any, I kept it all for myself. Now, the forgiveness that I hoarded has sprouted inside my heart like a crippled seed yielding bitter fruit. No more. At this moment, my life has taken on new hope and assurance. Of all the world's population, I am one of the few possessors of the secret to dissipating anger and resentment. I now understand that forgiveness has value only when it is given away. By the simple act of granting forgiveness, I release the demons of the past about which I can do nothing, and I create in myself a new heart, a new beginning. I will greet this day with a forgiving spirit.

"I will forgive even those who do not ask for forgiveness. Many are the times when I have seethed in anger at a word or deed thrown into my life by an unthinking or uncaring person. I have wasted valuable hours imagining revenge or confusion. Now I see the truth revealed about this psychological rock inside my shoe. The rage I nurture is often one-sided, for my offender seldom gives thought to his offense. I will now and forevermore silently offer my forgiveness even to those who do not see that they need it. By the act of forgiving, I am no longer consumed by unproductive thoughts. I give up my bitterness. I am content in my soul and effective again with my fellow man.

"I will greet this day with a forgiving spirit. I will forgive those who criticize me unjustly. Knowing that slavery in any form is wrong, I also know that the person who lives a life according to the opinion of others is a slave. I am not a slave. I have chosen my counsel.

"I know the difference between right and wrong. I know what is best for the future of my family, and neither misguided opinion nor unjust criticism will alter my course. Those who are critical of my goals and dreams simply do not understand the higher purpose to which I have been called.

Therefore, their scorn does not affect my attitude or action. I forgive their lack of vision, and I forge ahead. I now know that criticism is part of the price paid for leaping past mediocrity.

"I will greet this day with a forgiving spirit. I will forgive myself. For many years, my greatest enemy has been myself. Every mistake, every miscalculation, every stumble I made has been replayed again and again in my mind. Every broken promise, every day wasted, every goal not reached has compounded the disgust I feel for the lack of achievement in my life.

"My dismay has developed a paralyzing grip. When I disappoint myself, I respond with inaction and become more disappointed. I realize today that it is impossible to fight an enemy living in my head. By forgiving myself, I erase the doubts, fears, and frustration that have kept my past in the present. From this day forward, my history will cease to control my destiny.

"I have forgiven myself.

"My life has just begun.

"I will forgive even those who do not ask for forgiveness.

"I will forgive those who criticize me unjustly.

"I will forgive myself.

"I will greet this day with a forgiving spirit."

-- Abraham Lincoln